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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume I: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Consumer Culture

Consumer Culture, Young Voters, and American Presidential Elections

Guide for Curriculum Unit 10.01.05
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Study of the American political election system at the presidential level is an excellent way to help students understand the role that mass and segmented consumption play in politics. Understanding that the average citizen plays a supportive role in a democracy is important; however, it is not all that the young people of the country should recognize about government.

The consumer citizen is a modern phenomenon in America. This unit will take students through an analysis of three major elections, reflecting both visible and invisible changes that have allowed the political model containing consumerism to flourish. By examining the elections of 1936, 1960, and 2008, students gain the opportunity to explore the role that consumer culture and media technology have played in the rise of a new consumer citizen. They should recognize that a citizen has power in elections, not merely by voting, but by critically scrutinizing the consumer's role in the shaping of politics, the politicians, and the ideals and stereotypes that define our leaders. This power is one that should be an obligation rather than an option.

(Recommended for U.S. History, Civics, and Government, grades 9-12)

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